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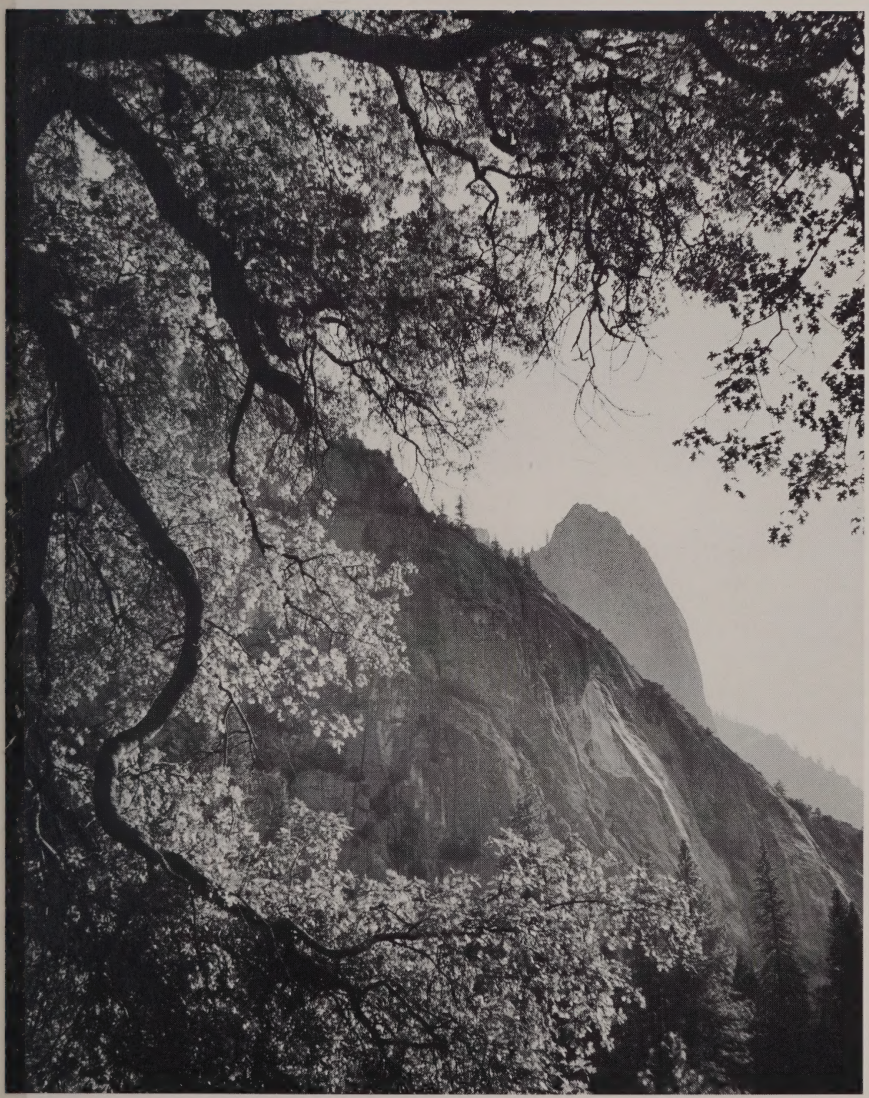
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ JUNE 1998

SACRED JOURNEY™

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit

of unity among humankind.

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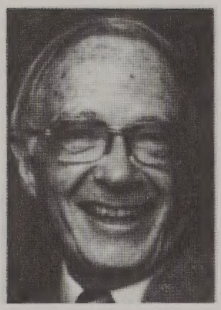
Cover photo by: Robert Campbell, Yosemite Valley, CA.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



June is the most beautiful month of the year in Princeton. The yellow, pink, and white blossoms of the forsythia and flowering fruit and magnolia trees form both canopy and carpet between heaven and earth. Lying in the softly scented grass beside the sparkling blue waters of Lake Carnegie, I'm aware of a divine presence in everything around me: ducks, sparrows, squirrels, trees–the whole creation. Surely, there is that of God in everyone and everything. Yes, with all its sensuous glories and the miracle of new life, spring reveals to us once again the beauty and goodness that God has implanted in everything, including you and me, and we rejoice in the knowledge that there is more to the mystery of life than problems and pain and suffering.

Needless to say, television, newspapers, and the radio relentlessly remind us that the essential goodness we were born with is often, and far too easily, covered over with a fog of confusion, fear, and a serious misunderstanding of what would make us happy.

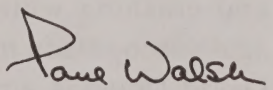
What would make you happy? Probably the same thing that would make me happy: to be free . . . free from the addiction of constantly wanting things to be different than they are. Hardly a moment goes by that we don't wish the situation were different than it is, that we were somewhere

else, in place or time, that other people were different than they are, that we were different, that we were younger, or more attractive, or had more money, or power, or better health. You name it. The list of wishes is endless, like the moving line of mechanical ducks in a shooting gallery.

Yet, as I lie on the grassy shore of the lake, watching the real and beautiful mother duck leading her tiny brood out into deeper water, I realize once again that I have it all, right here, right now. This moment is perfect, just as it is. In fact, it couldn't be other than it is. And that's true of every sacred moment that we live. All we have to do is to realize that truth and celebrate it with joy and gratitude!

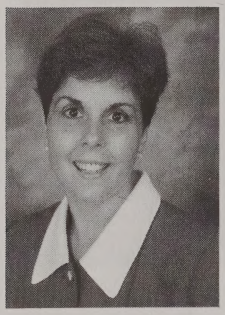
I sit up to find a more comfortable position and, unbidden, a motley array of thoughts, like a flock of black crows, starts picking and plucking apart the peace and joy of THIS moment.

Ah well . . . for a brief spell I had tasted the bliss that radiates out from the still center at the divine heart of Being–my Being; and yours. If only we could stay in the moment, moment by moment. Wouldn't that be heaven!



Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



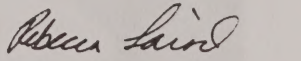
I grew up in a Western sage-dappled valley where foothills buttress craggy, spruce-tipped peaks. Aptly, as a church-going child, I memorized my favorite verse from the Psalms: I lift up mine eyes to the hills—from whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Ps. 121:1-20). When difficult times came my way, I looked to the blue-gray majesty of the mountains for solace. After a decade of adulthood and city life I first stared in wonder at the sheer rock inclines and crashing waterfalls of Yosemite National Park. I again recognized my raw need for beauty. As my friend David Douglas writes in his book *Wilderness Sojourn*: "Wilderness remains not merely a symbol but an actual setting—a spiritual reservoir able to evoke prayer as spontaneously as a house of worship built by human hands."[1] The wild, beautiful, untamed places call out to the soul. This month the cry and call of beauty echoes through our issue.

In *Calling Me Home*, Marcus Losack, director of Ceile De, a spiritual formation and retreat ministry in Ireland, speaks of the desert tradition of spirituality from his hermitage overlooking the Wicklow mountains. Henry Stark ironically finds his place in the universe

while searching for a lost friend in the High Sierra of Northern California in *A Transforming Experience*. The words of 13th-century Japanese monk, Dogen Zenji, instruct Robert Reese as he recounts a hot summer's river walk with his young daughter. And while Carolyn Foote Edelmann expects to find what she is looking for in the ancient standing stones and art of France, she discovers a new sense of spirit inside the region's glorious cathedrals. Poet Phyllis Cole-Dai wishes to "read the world's religion like tender leaves" while Roberta White marvels, as I did, at Yosemite's splendor. Finally, in *Spirituality & Healing*, Patrick Farren describes the healing circle of friends that sustained him through cancer treatments.

The advice gleaned from this issue is rather simple: In places of splendor, the best way to pray is with eyes wide open.

Blessings,



Rebecca Laird

[1]*David Douglas,* Wilderness Sojourn: Notes in the Desert Silence, *HarperCollins, 1987.*

Marcus Losack beneath the High Cross at Monasterboice.

CALLING ME HOME
A SACRED JOURNEY

Marcus Losack

Marcus Losack is an Anglican priest and executive director of Ceile De, an ecumenical center for pilgrimage and spiritual formation in Ireland and author of Glendalough: A Celtic Pilgrimage.[1] SACRED JOURNEY *asked this intense and passionate man to reflect on his life and share some life lessons he has learned along the way.*

I find myself, at the age of forty-four, sitting in a kitchen extension of a small building which twelve months ago was an old stone shed full of oak logs. We have restored it as a small hermitage, with absolutely beautiful views over the Annamoe Valley, down to the river and up to the Wicklow Mountains beyond.

So, here I find myself looking out over the mountains, watching the blue tits and the robins feeding on the peanuts that we have put out on the trees. There is generally a very deep sense of presence and tranquility here in Annamoe, about three miles from Glendalough.

In these moments that I have to sit in the hermitage alone, I want to reflect on my own spiritual journey for your readers, hoping that perhaps, as I describe some of the places that I've traveled on that journey, it will have some relevance

and meaning for you.

Where did this journey all begin for me? Undoubtedly, a long, long time ago, before I was conceived in my mother's womb. I remember her telling me stories that when I was conceived she was at that time a churchgoer, playing the organ in a Methodist chapel in England where she played those beautiful Wesley hymns. As a young child I recall she took me to the Methodist church and I sat on her knee as she continued to play. It seems a long time ago, and yet those chords of Wesley's hymns still strike magic in my soul. When I hear them or when I sing them, which I love to do, it seems to bring back ancestral memories for me, deep in my blood and soul and heart.

My father was a teacher who enjoyed visiting historical places, and whilst I disagreed with him quite a lot at times in my life, especially in my adolescent rebellion, I look back now and thank him for the gifts of teaching abilities which he must have bequeathed to me, even though he was a staunch atheist, at least so he said.

The journey, as I made it, took me through education in England, primary and secondary school. I have a vivid memory of being nine years old at primary school and, as the headmaster was praying with the whole school assembled, I closed my eyes and I can remember this very penetrating white/red/fiery/mystical light shining, from the sun I suppose, through the windows of the school into my soul and into my head. I was filled with this deep presence and tranquility.

The Desert

It was no surprise, except perhaps to me, that at secondary school I started to be attracted to religion, particularly after I read my first book, cover to cover, which was Bunyan's

Pilgrim's Progress. Then I met a teacher, who was a monk in my secondary school, and he acted like a mentor for me at that time of confirmation. When I was seventeen and full of exploration and adventure, I went to this monk and I said that I felt I was hearing voices. I didn't believe in God but I was searching. I said I was thinking of going out to the Holy Land to visit the desert; why I wanted to go to the desert at seventeen years of age I don't know. The monk said, "Marcus, how long are you thinking of going for?" and I said, "Well, I'm not sure, I hadn't thought about it." And he looked at me between the eyes and he said, "Well, you know, anything less than a month is child's play."

And with that word from the master, I bought my ticket and I journeyed to Jerusalem, and all I had with me was a brown galabiya that I'd made from the blanket on my bed. I took with me my New Testament Greek and a copy of the Bible, since I was learning Greek for university entrance the following year. I left Jerusalem and got a bus down to Jericho and thought, well, I'll go down by the Dead Sea, maybe where the Qumran scrolls were written; find a cave there to look into.

The Dead Sea was hot and dry and salty. I went to Jericho and was directed to the local monastery. So I climbed up to this monastery and knocked on the door, and this very old, white-haired, Greek Orthodox father let me in and said nothing. He silently took me around the church, and I asked him in English if I could stay. Eventually he broke his silence and said he couldn't allow me to stay because it was reserved for the Orthodox only. If I wanted to sleep in the caves above the monastery, on top of the mountain, I was free to do so, and they would look after me as best they could. With darkness falling very rapidly, and a certain fear within me of needing a place to stay, I climbed up to the top of that mountain above the monastery and fell asleep. I actually

spent the best part of forty days and forty nights up there, coming down during the day to the spring at the bottom for water, shade, and exercise. I simply ate dry bread and water. During those forty days and forty nights I discovered that the monastery was the "Monastery of Temptation," traditionally associated with the temptation stories of Jesus in the desert, and also that the mountain I was sleeping on was, in fact, traditionally known as the "Mountain of Temptation." Some strange quirk of fate had drawn me to that place and provided me with my first real desert experience. It was like a river flooding through my soul. When I left, I was thin and a bit sick, but I managed to get home to England and my university.

Ireland

I went on to theological college, then came to Ireland and met and fell in love immediately with my present wife, Noleen, a Roman Catholic. We experienced an ecumenical marriage with all the difficulties that involved in Ireland. As soon as I came to Ireland, I decided I didn't want to live in Britain any more. I trusted my Celtic instincts and acknowledged my Celtic blood. So now I had a family in Ireland, a parish in Ireland, and then some strange times.

I was very unhappy in parochial ministry. I went off to work in Libya with political prisoners for awhile as an Anglican chaplain. Then from there, of all places, to Jerusalem to teach in St. George's College, an Episcopal center in the Holy Land. My job was to lead pilgrimages into the desert. So I explored the desert even more, and took groups back to the Monastery of Temptation, and all the other monasteries. Obviously these places were written on my heart and soul, and I had the great joy and privilege of leading groups into the desert, particularly to St. Anthony's Monastery, named

for the great founding father of monasticism in the Eastern deserts of Egypt. Visiting St. Paul's Monastery in Egypt was wonderful, as were trips to beautiful Syrian, Egyptian, and Coptic monasteries which were the cradle in which desert monasticism flowered.

The more I studied about desert monasticism, the more I studied about Celtic monasticism, I realized they were one and the same thing. Irish spirituality was so heavily influenced by the desert tradition, particularly the teachings of the Egyptian Church and the Syrian Church, and the desert fathers and mothers like St. Anthony, and others.

Coming Home

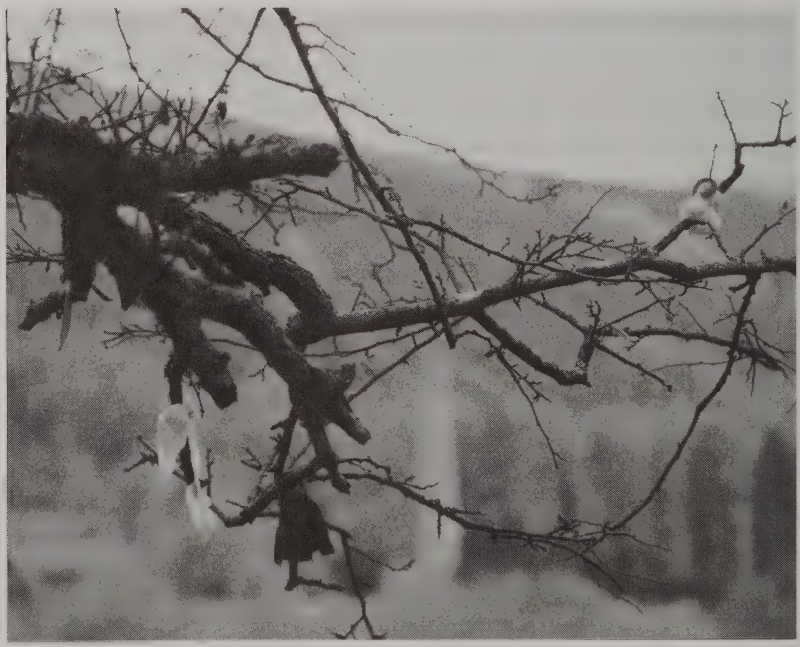
After living through the Gulf War, Jerusalem became just too painful to bear. Our family, my newly adopted daughter, Jihmah, who is Palestinian, my two sons born in Ireland, Sean and Etan, and my wife, Noleen, came back to Ireland with nothing. And as I prepared to leave Jerusalem, I read *Confessions of St. Patrick*, a wonderful document that explains Patrick's spiritual conversion and describes his vision when he sees the angel Victor coming to him in the night carrying countless letters, and in the *Confessions* Patrick says, "I heard the voices of the Irish calling me home . . . calling me home." And those voices perhaps which I also heard calling me home, called to something deep in my soul, drawing me back to Ireland to set up programs in the Celtic tradition.

So we came back and I founded Ceile De, which is the Irish name for an eighth century spiritual reform movement which tried to get back to those pure teachings of the desert spiritual tradition. The Ceile De movement historically had led to the flowering of Celtic art and calligraphy in the so-called "Golden Age" of Celtic Christianity from 500-1000

A.D. This movement guided me to name our own organization after it, in the hope of rekindling the fire and the vision of the Celtic tradition.

I worked in a parish for the first couple of years because we needed some income, but never felt very happy. I wanted to do something new, with life in it, and let my own gifts really be exercised.

It was a very painful process, letting go of the church, because I love the church so much with all it's faults and failings. I love and I am a member of the body of the church. But I was growing disillusioned with the structures of the church and feeling that they were becoming increasingly irrelevant. It was such a difficult break, emotionally, for a clergyman to let go of the church. It was like cutting the



Gregory Rick

A blackthorn bush with cloths tied and left by recent pilgrims to Glendalough, Ireland.

cord with Mother Church and seeking like a child for new life. It was a painful birthing process. There were also great financial fears of insecurity. I had to give up the church house, salary, and pension. I was taking a risk, not just for myself, but with the family. Could we pay the bills? Could we survive financially? I didn't want to be irresponsible. I wanted to take care of my children and my wife like any person would, yet I recognized that it was important that we make a break.

So at that point an American friend, Bill Jamieson, who is now Vice President of the Institute of Servant Leadership in Asheville, N.C., came up with some money at a time when we needed it. Those dollars provided the bridge which allowed us to cross over the fears and anxieties, if you like. And as soon as we crossed over that bridge, we decided that we were going to develop pilgrimages. Things didn't seem as bad anymore. The anxieties subsided. The fears went away. It is amazing how good you feel when you've actually taken the decision which you know is right for you, but one which you've been struggling with for quite a long time. There was a great sense of freedom and purpose as we sold our little house in Dublin, moved up to Annamoe in the Wicklow Mountains, and bought an old Irish cottage with some land on it. Thanks to the support of the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C. with Carole Crumley and Tilden Edwards, Bill Jamieson and others in America, we had our first American pilgrimage groups come to Ireland and we also took groups back to Jerusalem and Sinai to the desert monasteries.

Anxiety and Change

In the middle of my recollections, I would like to share more with your readers about anxiety. It really is true: you

cannot serve God and money. You'll become dominated by one or the other. There is a real conflict there as well. The two can be reconciled, but it is very frightening when you're trying to follow your own dreams and don't know where the next meal is going to come from. There is great adventurousness in going forward. Risk-taking takes knowing and believing that some act is the right thing to do. It is amazing how healing comes when you realize if you act in faith and trust using your common sense and your integrity, you will know the right time for things. I think a lot of it has to do with timing and discernment. If these things are all in place and you know it's the right thing to do, then you cannot possibly fail, because God is just like a flooding river that pours in to wash away the fears and anxieties and to encourage you that things are new. It's like a new baptism, a new washing, a new cleansing, and a regeneration. It was certainly a regeneration for my own life, my own soul, my vocation, my ministry, my work. It was a regeneration of my creative instincts, my administrative skills. It was a regeneration of the fire in my soul which had become deadened by the church and put out by the complaints and petty-mindedness of incessantly warring parishioners. I suddenly decided, this is it! This is wonderful.

Small is Beautiful

I believe strongly that the old structures of the church are past and we need to look again at the beautiful model from the Celtic tradition: small is beautiful. Start off small again. In the Ceile De movement in the early Irish church, there were never more than twelve people in any local community. If there got to be more than twelve, they would split off and form another group of twelve, and so on. Of course, that's probably how Jesus did it; he wasn't into big

churches either. Maybe that's why the apostles were so successful, because they kept themselves small. I remember when I was thinking about going independent, I asked a mentor of mine, "What should I do? Should I leave the church institution and start things new or should I take that old parish with those old stone buildings and try and do new things with them?" And he just looked at me and said, "Marcus, you'll spend so much of your energy trying to get them to go along with you that you'll burn yourself out." He said, "You need to put new wine into new wine skins, and you're dealing with new wine here. This is the new wine of the Celtic tradition." We need new structures. We need new places where we can put all our energy into the new.

The Vision

Here in Annamoe, we are trying to build a small Celtic retreat center. We have the site, we have some old stone buildings ourselves now. We have the vision, we have the prayer, and we are just waiting for the planning permission, I suppose, and we are waiting for the "Architect of the Universe," for the energy of God to edge us forward. Our dream is to be earthed and rooted in this beautiful countryside where we can deepen our programs and ask some radical questions of our own lifestyles. I ask you all to pray for us that that will come to fruition if it is meant to be. It would be nice to know that some of you who have read this might visit us one day to be part of it.

The Celtic Way

I'm looking out the window now. I'm looking across at this field that we've just bought where we hope to develop plans for a small Celtic center. In the Celtic tradition you

ask permission first of all from the land. You ask permission from the birds. You ask permission from the trees and the soil and the plants that you're going to dig up. As I sit here, I look across and I ask permission from the field, from the trees, the oak trees that surround, from the blue tits that fly over it. I ask permission from the animals and the wildlife and from the stones themselves which hold the memories of the ancestors of this valley, and those who have been here before. I ask their permission that we may build the center here in this beautiful place.

May it come to be, O God, according to your will and desire, but also according to the wills and desires that are in our own hearts on this Celtic journey.

The Celtic journey is a journey into the past, learning about the church of the past. There was a time when these big, hierarchical churches didn't exist. There was a time when diversity was encouraged and uniformity was frowned upon. There was a time when cattle were raised and when monks prayed and wrote beautiful, illuminated manuscripts and carved beautiful, high crosses in stone, when artists and musicians and poets and seers and visionaries and druids and Christians, priests and contemplatives, were venerated, when hermits like St. Kevin of Glendalough were able to practice their contemplation and spiritual formation. There was a time when belief was strong and people were open to the love of God. Leaving all their fears and anxieties behind them, or perhaps even taking them with them, they journeyed on pilgrimage simply for the love of God and for the love of Christ. They cared not where the winds would blow them on their journey, only that God would deliver them to

that place where they were meant to be and bring them to that shore where they were meant to land.

So I'd like to end with a prayer for you, and for myself, so that in this time of great change at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the third millennium, we'll actually have the courage to make the journey, in a coracle– in a little wooden boat made of animal skins with no oars and no sail. Irish monks let the winds of the ocean and the currents of the tides carry them in the Spirit of God. They believed the whole universe and the whole of creation, the ocean, the wind, and the waves, were full of the spiritual presence of God. Therefore, they were being carried by that spiritual presence when they were being driven by the waves. It is such a wonderful image of being enveloped by the love of God.

And in that spirit of being one within that mystical body, we say farewell, simply like two pieces of driftwood parting on an ocean as the currents take us off in different directions, knowing we are united in the same sea. We are one in the same world, we are one in the Spirit of God.

May God bless us. May God bless you. May
God bind us together in the unity of love and
may the gifts of God be recreated within us.
May the eye of God be between us in each eye.
The hand of God be between us in each hand.
The love of God be between us in each love.
The hope of God be between us in each hope.
The sunshine of God be between us in each sunshine.
The rain of God be between us in each rain.
The tears of God be between us in each tear.
The joy of God be between us in each joy.

The challenge, the triumph, the beauty of God be between us in each beauty.
So may God strengthen our arms and enliven our hearts and minds in the name of Christ.

Farewell.

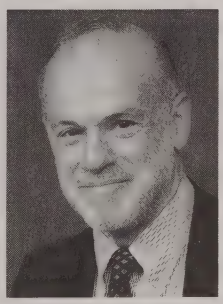
Jackie Beckett

[1] *To contact Marcus Losack write: Ceile De, Castlekevin, Annamoe, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.* Glendalough: A Celtic Pilgrimage *is published by Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA.*

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

A Natural Revelation

Henry Stark



What should have been a routine eleven day hike in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California developed into an incredibly difficult, frustrating, and frightening experience. It also led to a remarkable spiritual awakening.

We were a disparate threesome. Bob had spent all of his working life in the academic world, teaching and doing research on social aspects of the family. Nancy, Bob's wife, had pursued a career in biology but found it necessary to put everything on hold when their two children were born. I was the national sales manager of a large, branded men's apparel company and had just been divorced. We were all in our late thirties. Outdoor life was a wonderful release from the daily pressures and we tried to spend vacations together rafting, climbing, canoeing.

After much preparation we "slimmed down" our backpacks to a whopping fifty-five pounds and drove into the mountains of Yosemite National Park. Because we were go-

Henry Stark resides in Connecticut. He retired from Levi-Strauss to pursue his love of teaching and writing. His article "Divine Assistance" appeared in our August 1996 issue.

ing into the remotest and wildest areas we registered our proposed itinerary at the ranger station. We also signed a document relieving the Park Service of all responsibility for our health and safety.

The first three days were terribly disheartening. The trails were steeper than we had supposed, the summer sun heated the mountain air and radiated from the rocks, the streams had dried up in the drought, our packs were heavier than we could manage, and the insects attacked us incessantly. We conserved our food and rationed the water, took frequent breaks, and cursed ourselves for our poor planning and lack of conditioning.

It seemed that every time there was some good news, there was a heavier dose of bad news. After hiking four miles to a stream where we could replenish our meager water supply, we filled our water bottles, bota bags, and two-quart canteen. The canteen slipped out of our grimy hands, hit a rock, and punctured. On only the second day of our trip we lost twenty-five percent of our water carrying capacity. When we reached a cool, clear lake in which to swim and cool off, the mosquitos were so thick we couldn't doff our clothes. Nothing was going well for us.

The third day we decided to save ourselves three miles of hiking by taking a shortcut over a mountain. We climbed constantly in the hot sun trying to ward off swarming hordes of buzzing, biting mosquitos. They carpeted our arms and legs if we stopped to rest. We pushed our way over rocks, through thorny brambles, over and around fallen trees, and always with our heavy packs pushing us into the ground. Squinting through sweat-burned eyes, we finally reached the ridge line, unable to find the trail.

On our map it seemed that the trail would be evident but on the ground everything looked different. We selected a tree that seemed larger than the others and dropped our

Robert Campbell

packs under it. We decided to split up and head in opposite directions to search for the trail. Bob and I headed north and Nancy, totally despondent, went south.

An hour later, Bob and I returned to the big tree to meet Nancy. She wasn't there. We yelled her name. No response. We ventured in opposite directions calling to her. Still no response. We blew our whistles and listened for hers. Nothing. We searched an ever-increasing radius from the tree, constantly blowing our whistles and yelling, to no avail. After an hour we knew we weren't going to find her. If she was still in the area, we surmised that she was unconscious or dead. She had no water, no sweater, no food. If the lack of water or hypothermia didn't get her, a snake, bear or serious fall might. If she had wandered beyond the sound of our voices and whistles, we assumed she'd never find her way back to this pinpoint of earth through the thick forest. I panicked while looking for her as all the trees looked alike.

Bob's emotions ran the gamut: panic, fear, concern, and helplessness. I did my best to calm him, but understandably at this point, my spiritual maxims had no effect.

Logic and concrete plans snapped the academic back to reality. We decided that I would spend up to four days camped there while Bob retraced our route to get help. Rangers, mules, and helicopters were all options. I should stay in case Nancy might regain consciousness in the area or find her way back.

From My Diary:

I keep myself as busy as possible pitching a tent and inventorying my food and water. It's deathly quiet. Nine miles to the nearest people. Worrying about Nancy . . . about Bob. No sounds except the wind in the trees, the buzzing of flies, and that awful whining of mosquitos. From time to time I hear the mocking chatter of birds. (Am I getting paranoid already?) I'm sitting at the

foot of a tree and ants, large reddish-black ants, have been crawling up and over everything. Flies are setting on me constantly but I am at a point where I only brush away the mosquitos. A curious deer comes to check me out.

I feel like a fool but every fifteen minutes I blow my whistle and yell "Nancy" to the unfriendly and threatening trees. They seem like an ominous, concealing barrier.

The sun offers me less and less warmth. The breeze is picking up. The bugs are increasing. I feel so isolated, 7000 feet up. I'm surrounded by huge, uplifted mountains and ridges of hard, bald, unyielding granite and tall, straight pines. I've never been so far away from people. I've always coveted quiet and natural beauty. Now I've got them and I hate it.

It's so frustrating to sit here and not be able to do anything except blow a stupid whistle. Man is so small upon this earth, yet we delude ourselves into thinking we're so important. It's getting dark. There is absolutely nothing to do but worry about my closest friends and get more and more fearful for my own plight. I go inside the tent and let the whirring of the mosquitos and my own exhaustion finally put me to sleep.

In the morning the packs are covered with bees. There are significant signs that a bear has visited the perimeter of the tent and the packs. I have never felt more lonely, isolated, inadequate, scared, exhausted, in my life.

I have no control over anything. There is absolutely nothing I can do.

I found a comfortable spot under a tree, far from the bees, and I closed my eyes. In those days I knew nothing about meditation. The word itself conjured up strange people chanting on top of a mountain in India. But at that moment I fell into a trancelike state. My mind cleared. All my fears, anger, and frustration fell away. A sudden calmness pervaded me and I felt in total harmony with my surround-

ings. I no longer felt compelled to fight the perceived obstacles and dangers. I recognized a very natural and constant order. The flies, bees, mosquitos, and bears have always lived there. The trees, rocks, sun, wind, midday heat and evening cool are part of the life of our planet. I was the element out of place. I became more aware and appreciative of the world outside myself that always exists. I had a tremendous realization that there was a natural harmony here in the mountains, and everywhere, and that I was part of it. For the first time in my life I felt that I was truly a part of God's universe.

Oh, Nancy had walked about two miles and found the trail. She collapsed on it and was rescued by a taciturn man and his mule. Bob got lost several times on his mad dash to the ranger station but eventually found it and met up with Nancy. They enlisted the help of the park rangers, some horses and mules, and brought me out three days after my lonely vigil began.

Years later I still have to remind myself to relax, to stop fighting insignificant "obstacles," and to be aware of and to fit into the Natural Harmony.

There's a rule posted at the entrance of many wildlife areas, "Leave only footprints, take only pictures." I'm happy to say that although I didn't have a camera I took a wonderfully important lesson on living out of those California mountains: "I am part of God's universe."

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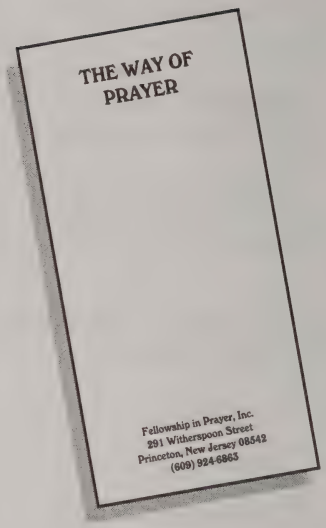


* * * * * * *

Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey.*

ILLUMINATIONS

the circle is the world
God is the center
the straight lines are the lives of human beings

the closer we are to God
the closer we become to one another
the closer we are to one another
the closer we are to God

Dorotheus of Gaza
Sixth century monk

We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.

The Talmud

Green onions flowering—
For a moment golden
Buddha was there.

Kawabata Bosha

The God who is in fire, who is in water, who has entered into the whole world, who is in plants, who is in trees—to that God be adoration!

Upanishads

God is like a river flowing through us. Alleluia.

Thew Elliott

When the signs of age begin to mark my body and still more when they touch my mind; when the illness that is to carry me off strikes from without or is born within me; when the painful moment comes in which I suddenly awaken to the fact that I am ill or growing old; In all those dark moments, O God, grant that I may understand that it is You, provide only my faith is strong enough, who are painfully parting the fibers of my being in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my substance and bear me away within Yourself.

Teilhard de Chardin

Rocks turn to soil very slowly. First, water seeps into the solid rock, separating its molecules, destroying the chemical bonds which held it together. Minute cracks form and are soon enlarged by weathering. Then a plant takes hold in soil gathered in the crack, and its roots further split the rock. The weathering process will begin on the newly exposed surfaces and eventually the whole rock will be turned to soil.

Sign on a nature trail, Roosevelt Island.

Several of these quotes were submitted by Alan E. Mayers, a "retired federal bureaucrat" who now records books on tape for the visually impaired and reads to inner-city school children.

THIS WATER IS TALKING

Robert Reese

As you penetrate the flowing and not-flowing of water,
the ultimate character of all things is instantly realized.
Shobengenzo, Bussho, Dogen Zenji

My daughter, Pilar, three years old and fearless, loves nothing more than wading along the shallow shoreline outside our house. On the Fourth of July it was eighty-three degrees and we were knee-deep in the slow current, threading our way upstream, moving over submerged rocks as if great weights were tied to our feet. Pilar randomly stalked minute fish swimming against the current. Pairs and trios of mallards lifted from the water and pounded the late summer air furiously to put distance between us.

Here my daughter introduced me to a theme found in the nature writing of Dogen Kigen, a 13th century Japanese monk. Holding hands, we walked barefoot upstream. Besides the sounds of water, there was just the immense silence. We stopped and listened to the water. She asked me for a story; I did not have one. Listening, she turned in delight and announced, "Daddy, this water is talking."

Robert Reese is lay ordained in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and has been practicing for ten years with Rev. Katherine Thanas at the Monterey Bay Zen Center. He is the director of the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts and lives with his wife and daughter in Carmel Valley, CA.

Sometimes we *do* hear water talking. While listening to the river a kind of silence prevails, broken only by the rush of water over rocks. The experience of silence by a river is more like hearing faint echoes, each a series of dim reverberations. The language of the river is not any known language, but a language nonetheless. It is familiar to the body and communicates a watery eloquence. It tells of the nature of water, of how it lives and functions.

Walking upstream, my daughter and I paid attention to the single prevalent feature of landscape–flux and change. Moving slowly, we noticed small occurrences in the constantly changing riverbed: the random order of riverbed stones against the current, each sequence of rocks the result of unceasing movement. Though seemingly insignificant, these small events are clearly imparting a collective language of rivers.

Walking in water returns a sharpness of attention. The point of view from the river is singular. It points to our relationship with the watershed and to ourselves. Nothing is so unfamiliar as the well-known when viewed from the perspective of walking in a river. Our neighbor calls my daughter and me hydrologists for our river walks. But the practice of walking with a child in the river is closer to ontology–the investigation of the nature of being.

We think we understand our life, who we are, and our place in the sweep of things. We think we live in a world that makes sense. Then–sometimes vividly–the rug is pulled out from under our long-held assumptions. We temporarily misplace our map. The narrative we've made up about our life no longer has meaning. Perspective starts listing this way and that–and the truth about the world is disclosed, things are constantly in flux and nothing is essentially anything apart from the rest of the world. Spending time by a river demonstrates this point.

Robert Reese and Pilar on a river walk

Further upstream we found a number of extraordinary pale gray rocks. Pilar became interested in the relationship between rocks and the tiny fish and their seemingly random darting movements. She was not so interested in knowing names of things but in the relationships between them–in how they were connected to one another.

As we waded along the shaded bank, fat steelhead trout rolled along the bottom of a deep pool. We both turned as the sycamores shimmered in the wind. Only the beginnings of branches were visible under the foliage, as though a few thin arms supported the mass of trembling leaves. Black birds shot from the trees, tilting into the afternoon sky. Then it was still. That was

when I looked at Pilar, her arms spread for balance in the aspect of a cross. I spoke silently to myself, in my mind, but not with sentences–just images. Then I did not think anything at all, but simply stood there in some state resembling curiosity and wonder. The quiet of the riverbed had ceased to be something that we were observing–now it was something we were part of. Or our quiet had joined the stream's quiet. Just below my knees the Carmel River pulled with enormous purpose towards the Pacific Ocean. My daughter showed me that I'd been fortunate at being given a chance to discover mountain and rivers, sky and trees in a context that restored me to the religion of my childhood–which was primarily gratitude and awe.

The waters we walk in are reminders of wildness and process, serenity and chaos. After a time, we entered a deeper pool–the water startlingly clear. With no leaves on the surface, it was difficult to discern the water's plane and the fish appeared to float on a current of air. As we walked, small fish darted out of sight. When we stopped, they would appear again.

I spoke with a dim knowledge of the names of plants and fish and insects and birds. Gradually I began to say less. Walking against the river we seemed to hardly move. Nor did I want to. The longer we spent in the river, the more effortlessly and quietly we moved through the water. The effect was intoxicating, providing a sense of attention and affinity with the water. I did not want to feel again the sequence of daily events, of analysis and deliberation. Just the affirmative hues of physical activity, child, fish, rock, wind, and water were all joined by movement and light creating sort of a participatory haiku. Some type of exchange seemed to transpire, but the nature of the trans-

action seemed unknowable in everyday terms.

One of Dogen's spiritual ancestors asked his teacher, "Why don't I hear the sound of inanimate things teaching?"

The teacher replied, "You don't hear it yourself, but you shouldn't hinder that which does hear it."

Distillations

Phyllis Cole-Dai

If we take the world's enduring religions at their best, we discover the distilled wisdom of the human race.

Huston Smith

Oh, to be an old soul
who can read the world's religions
like tender leaves
in a bone-china teacup,
and know:

how to pursue divinity,
tracking the scent of my own blood
to find the hidden lair;
how to suffer grace like the dissident
who, spiked to a tree, became a god,
forgiving the hammer's conformity;
how to pare my thought and action of waste,

Phyllis Cole-Dai is a mystic who lives in Columbus, Ohio with her husband Jihong (who was born in China) and her cat Murphy (who rules the roost). A published poet and writer, she is also a co-founder of Epiphanies, Inc., a grassroots not-for-profit corporation whose mission is to "build bridges between traditional and emerging expressions of spirituality, and to expand awareness of the sacred."

sloops cut loose to till the sea,
leaving faintest of furrows behind;
how to mature in the web of constant relations,
spin threads in a social geometry
weighing silver with dew;
how to pour the water of my ordinary life
into a crystal cup, lift five prayers up
to damp the daily thirst of heaven;
how to brandish words like battle-chinked swords
still swung by locust-eating ghosts,
judge fatted kings and crowds;
how to come to the gate of eternal bliss,
then, stopped by a cry from illusion's abyss,
turn back to enlighten the lost;
how to carry long myths in the mind of my bones,
dance history into the chronicling ground,
call prophecies down from my seat of stone–

If I were an old soul,
if I knew all these things–
more–
and still I did not know–
then perhaps I would have regained
a certain wisdom lost,
forgotten or exiled power,
here in the drinking of this tea,
here in this midnight hour.

God Gift - Yosemite

Roberta White

O blessed Yosemite, holy ground
God's wonder-gift
Tunnel opens, God-majesty splashes senses
beauty bursts, hurts
Divine panorama crashes, smashes fragile humanity

God's spectacle, compressed 7 x 1 mile valley of wonders
expansion so unexpectedly placed upon you, in you
Gigantic granite, high and mighty
strains eyes, necks, hearts, and souls
El Capitan, Cathedral in the sky-mountain, Half Dome
Thunderous, tumbling waterfalls
Bridalvail, Yosemite, Vernal
Misty rhapsodies of beauty blowing rhythmically to the wind
blazing sunlight exploding gold, silver notes
upon the cascading torrents

Those who have ears to hear are rapturous
those who have eyes, see glory!
O blessed Yosemite, holy ground
God's wonder-gift
You fill up our senses
and the child in wisdom proclaims,
"I can't believe it!"

Sister Roberta White, B.V.M., wrote this poem while on a visit to Yosemite. She lives in Hawthorne, CA.

A Healing Circle

Patrick G. Farren

I found out in mid 1995, at fifty-one years of age, that I had a malignant brain tumor. About forty people gathered at the hospital on the night before my operation for prayer, company, and encouragement. It was a wonderful extension of family, old friends, colleagues, members of two men's groups I had been a part of, and neighbors. It was also, potentially, a leave-taking, since the odds against my surviving the operation, not to mention the disease itself, were substantial.

Days later, as I recovered at home, my wife and I marveled at the power and sweet support of the gathering that had been so quickly assembled by phone and that had wrapped us in collective love and hope. We wondered if–during the period of eight months when I faced chemotherapy and radiation–folks might be open to reassembling at our house once a month.

My spouse wrote a note updating the people who had attended the pre-operation group, inviting them to join us on the first Saturday of each month during my therapy. In the letter, friends were warmly invited to attend if and when they could; we also stated that no doubt there would be times when it would be in-

Patrick Farren lives with his family in Watertown, MA.

convenient for some to come, and that no RSVP's were necessary. The letters were sent to a geographically wider group as an easy way to invite prayerful attention.

Thus began a series of "healing circles" that, while fairly common among some feminists and in communities of caring for persons with AIDS, seemed culturally distant from many of us. Our gatherings have been remarkably successful on a number of levels, not only for members of our family but for the other forty or so people who have attended over the months. More than twenty people have been present at each of the eight healing circles. It quickly became apparent that while the healing had been intended for our family, a sense of mutual caring had spread easily, as acquaintances deepened and friendships were renewed. Several other individuals and families with a member facing cancer or another serious illness have asked what our circle is like, so here's a basic description.

It's spiritual without being sectarian; communal; low-key, nurturing, touching, and fun. Our circles are intended to "heal" if not to "cure"–that is, to bring us closer, to allow us to use the time we spend together to deepen our relationships and to say what we want to say, and to get better at being full human beings without necessarily having strong hope that the course of the illness may be transformed into wellness. On the other hand, there is an openness to miracles, and to the strength that can emanate from persons who connect their power collectively with prayer.

From 6-7:30 P.M. we share a potluck supper. After eating, we gather in our living room where one of us chimes a bell, calling us to silence. That person characterizes our presence together, usually in connection

with the season or a holiday, then invites my wife and me to offer a few words about how we're doing–so that folks will be informed without us having to relay the same news repeatedly. Then we begin our Quaker Meeting-style silence where, after about ten or fifteen minutes of group silence, friends are invited to comment, speak about their own burdens, share a song, or tell a story. We start our circle on time, both to allow attenders a clear sense of when the meeting will end and because our letter invited others unable to attend to be mindful of us, during the scheduled time, extending the power of our circle.

Our circles are intended to "heal" if not to "cure"

A folk singer and family friend brings his guitar and leads us in a few songs. Occasionally, a woman drums. We speak about the death of our son, who also had cancer–about two years earlier–keeping him present in our meetings as he continues to be present for our family every day. Usually our two teenage daughters join us for the socializing and the potluck, then drift off during the silence. We invite folks to mention their own physical or emotional burdens, or those of families and friends. Often tears flow; usually there is some wild laughter. Our dog lies quietly among us, or rests her head in someone's lap.

The mood is calm. There is lots of flexibility. Poems are read, anecdotes are recalled. There are invocations of the names and circumstances of others who have died or who are struggling. Sometimes I am invited to stand in the center of the circle, with all those present chanting and laying their hands on me. There is a spirit of ritual, with room for freshness and creativity. The

time flows quickly.

Little conventionally religious prayer is involved, relatively few verbal references to God or a Higher Power. Alternatively–which makes the sessions comfortable for people of a variety of congregations, as well as for non-believers and former churchgoers–it is all prayer, as close as many of us usually come to church. Repeatedly my wife and I are told how important the circles have become, how spiritually and personally enriching. The level of the silence has deepened, as have the personal nature of the conversation and the warmth of the hugs of greeting or parting.

With only a few words–perhaps a graceful reference to our sharing and a reminder of when the next meeting is scheduled–our trustworthy "gatherer" sounds the chime at 9:00 P.M., allowing folks to leave gracefully, although a few usually stay around helping pick up the food and do the dishes, and extending the conversation. If I feel particularly tired, I withdraw to bed, comforted by the power of all the good wishes.

This has been an easy way for us to receive a profound amount of support, while knowing we were fostering community. I have had to deal with the challenge of being receptive to the gentle, incredible power of the circle–to participate as fully as possible–while repressing my impulses to "manage" or "host" the event.

At a time when community is relatively rare, and among people who hunger for a way to connect with others and to express their caring, a circle can be most welcome. One need not even be ill to reach out and build this kind of bridge.

And By the Way, We Found The Grail

Carolyn Foote Edelmann

Michael Baigent, in his forward to *In Search of the Holy Grail and the Precious Blood*, calls life itself "a quest for soul-making." My traveling companion, Darlene Presto, and I share Baigent's "pilgrim's instinct . . . deep within us all, crying out to be fanned into renovating fire." In June of last year, we fanned our spiritual flames in Normandy and Brittany, on the trail of France's sacred and ancient sites. We paid special attention to those of King Arthur and the quest for the Holy Grail. We planned our adventure with Baigent's wise words in mind: "A pilgrim is not seeking to discover something new, but to remember what the Soul has always known. And, in this search, it helps to stand amidst sacred groves and stones in order that archaic memory might be triggered."

As Darlene and I planned our pilgrimage, we received signs and portents that we had made correct choices in choosing our location. Our first proof was my winning round-trip tickets to Paris by subscribing

Carolyn Foote Edelmann holds the William Carlos Williams Poetry Prize from the Paterson Library. She lives and works in Princeton, NJ.

to *France Today* in a contest I didn't know existed. Then, as Darlene handled lodging details, a call to a friend, whom she learned was close to death, lead us to St. Thegonnec. This is a tiny town in northern Brittany where Darlene's friend, Vy, had found sustenance. Vy remained lucid long enough to contact a French friend and arrange that a key to the cottage be waiting under the geraniums. So, we were lodged without cost in this Breton town, where many faithful pilgrims travel to visit its solid church, marvel at its towering carved *Calvaries* (statues).

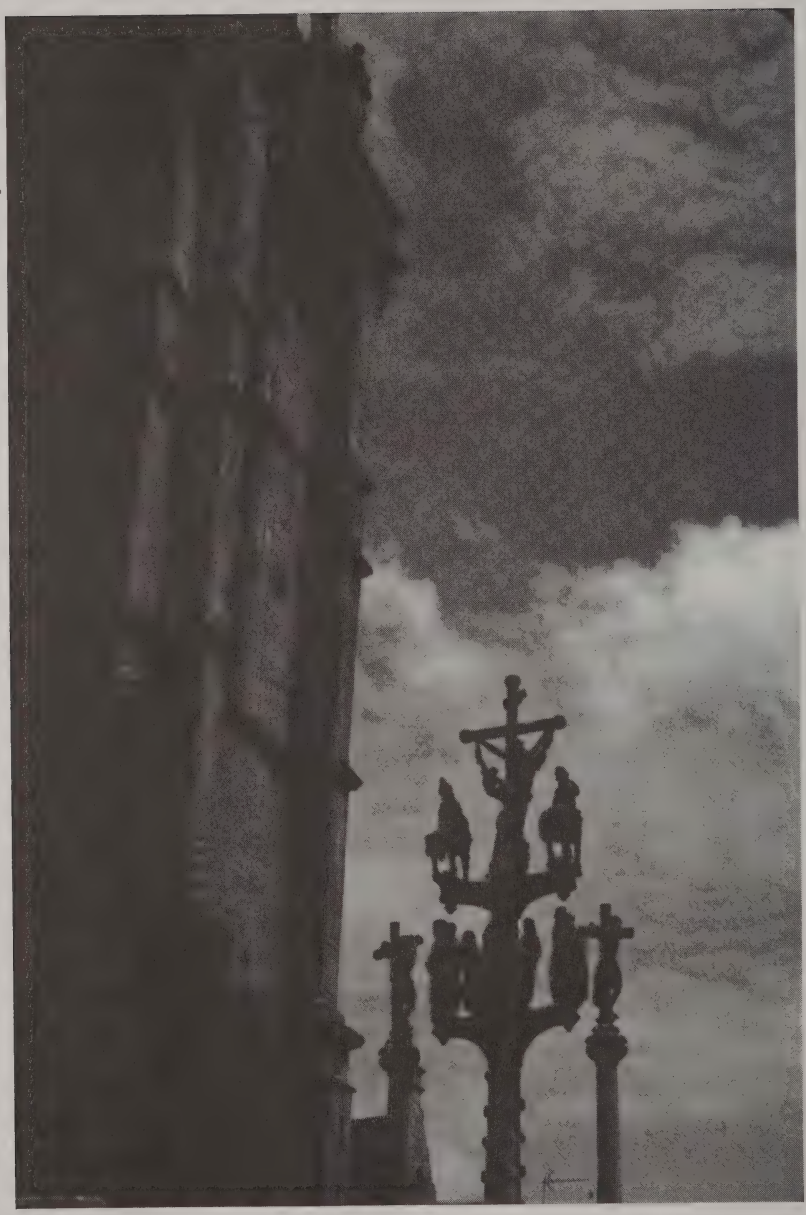
Darlene and I always set pilgrimage priorities before beginning our research. My priorities were art first; Arthurian sites and tumuli, followed by fairy groves, elfin habitats, and troll hideaways. (I have had my fill of churches and Church. I prefer my sacred spaces out of doors.) I was also determined to explore the peace museum in Caen, with time for photography and gastronomy. Churches and gardens ranked highest with Darlene, and food matters not at all.

Before this voyage I was instructed during meditation that "a new Carolyn is leaving for France, one who has never been there before. And a renewed Carolyn shall return." Even though France feels always my homeland, I knew this visit would demand the new and unexpected.

Given my preference for sacred spaces of nature and the sacred expressed through art, it surprises me now that the central rituals of our trip took place inside ancient churches.

Darlene and I were to "unwind the Church" at Mount St. Michel, to restore the Mount to Gaia. The night of our visit we returned to the pinnacle of Mt. St. Michel for the 10 P.M. Sound and Light performance, Les Imaginaires. For the first two hours, we explored

Carolyn Foote Edelmann



The calvaire at Carnac.

the Mount's venerable structures, lingering in its oldest sections. We felt the electricity surrounding its earliest stones and sacred well far beneath the Abbey church. Just before moonlit midnight, we made our way to the Abbey where electronic sophistication wed art and architecture, music and mysticism. A virtual wheaten loaf of bread rested beside a virtual chalice worthy of the Grail on the broad, real refectory table. In the long quest chamber, blood-red tapestries spun from light played along our feet. In the scriptorium, weighty tomes hung suspended, as if the monks had just left off inscribing and illustrating. As we were serenaded by music from Gregorian chants to the works of John Cage, fragrant tendrils of incense wafted from the crypt below to the uppermost nave—pure Mists of Avalon. Invisible monks sang office in shadowy recesses. Candle flames rose and danced hypnotically. The Abbey crowd evaporated. I moved to the high altar, its steps holding a white vestment which could have been white samite. Suddenly, my arms were tugged on high, an American Indian gesture appropriate to crests after sacred hours in the sweat lodge.

I have no idea how long I stood with arms raised. Gradually, I realized that the candles had returned to normal height and intensity. Then, I noticed Darlene at my side. We strolled wordlessly out into the flowered cloister where the scent of rosemary vied with lavender. Through twined cloister arches we saw the moon's reflection across tide-dampened quicksand that has threatened centuries of pilgrims. To Darlene's hushed query about what had transpired inside, I could truthfully answer, "All is accomplished."

Our ultimate ritual was reserved for Chartres. Once inside this thirteenth-century cathedral, Darlene traced

the deeply ridged marble circles of the legendary labyrinth upon her knees. Her sacred journey involved sacrifice, not only of comfort but of pride. But the upper church was not the ultimate object of our quest. In a dark little shop outside, we paid our francs and set out for the sooty and rock-bound crypt, oldest section of Chartres. We stood rapt as our guide recounted and I translated the legends of the Black Madonna and the sacred well—where nearby standing stones had laid foundation for the world-renowned edifice. Chartres' crypt has nothing to do with glass and sunlight, yet it has a glow undimmed by centuries.

Darlene and I took note of the curious combination of upstairs/downstairs spirituality which dogged our steps at Mount St. Michel and at Chartres. Back in St. Thegonnec, Darlene set out to explore while I used my college French in the cellar upon the housekeeper's feverish instructions on how everything worked. Darlene returned, insisting that I join her in the church's ossuary. I resisted. A storehouse of ancient bones is not a place of pilgrimage. Grudgingly, I followed my travel-partner into St. Thegonnec's. There life-sized, polychromed statues have long brought to life the Bible and local legends for inhabitants of this remote section of France. St. Anne, patroness of Breton (reputedly a native), holds pride of place. Anne is depicted with her daughter, the young Mary, at her knee.

Long ago villagers had built their ossuary below the apron of the church. To Bretons, then and now, life and death are not separate. These people like having deceased relatives nearby; they like passing them several times a week as they go from devotions to the bread baker's and bank. Once inside, I was relieved to discover the bones are not in view. Instead, we found a

Mount Saint Michel

colorful, carved tomb scene of the Christ. Mary, His mother, kneels staunchly at His side, staunchly bearing her grief. Mary of Magdala, bereft, sits to the right. Veronica holds her linen veil, imprinted with the Christ's face, while Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus support His body upon linen shrouds. It is no coincidence that flax had made the fortune of this town.

Cornish and Provencal legends insist that Joseph of Arimathea was the uncle of Christ. A tin merchant, Joseph is said to have traveled extensively among the mines and miners of Cornwall. Word has it that Joseph took the young Lad along on business trips to Brittany, that Joseph, after the murder of his Lord, returned to Cornwall for solace.

In St. Thegonnec's ossuary a statue thrusts a hand toward all gathered at the tomb. A tall, gilded chalice gleams in that hand. As I blinked my eyes, Darlene startled me quipping, "Carolyn, they're never going to believe us when we say we found the Grail!"

No we did not bring back the Grail. But our pilgrimage was true: We found what we had sought. Our souls "remembered truths which they had always known."

PRAYERS

A Twelfth Century Prayer

Lord, how much juice you can
squeeze from a single grape.
How much water you can draw
from a single well.
How great a fire you can kindle
from a tiny spark.
How great a tree you can grow
from a tiny seed,
My soul is so dry that by itself it
cannot pray;
Yet you can squeeze from it the
juice of a thousand prayers.
My soul is so parched that by
itself it cannot love;
Yet you can draw from it boundless
love for you and for my neighbor.
My soul is so cold that by itself
it has no joy;
Yet you can light the fire of
heavenly joy within me.
My soul is so feeble that by itself
it has no faith;
Yet by your power my faith grows
to a great height.
Thank you for prayer, for love,

for joy, for faith;
Let me always be prayerful,
loving, joyful, faithful.

Guigo the Carthusian

Dear Lord!
It's true, that into every life a little rain must fall. Thank you Lord for my ability to swim and tread water and please bless those I've rained on with the same buoyancy.

Norman Kiser

If I have offended you, O Wise Lord, whether by thought or word or deed, whether intentionally or inadvertently, I earnestly seek to make amends by offering you praise. If I have reduced the honour in which you are held, I proclaim your glory with even greater fervour. May your will rule in the hearts of all your creatures. May every animal and plant, as well as every man and woman, live according to your laws, for the seed of righteousness lives in every living thing.

Zoroaster

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